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## Mexico Is Facing Crucial Election

**T**he future course of North America could be radically changed next year by an event that most people in the United States aren't even aware will be taking place: the election of five state governors and 400 members of the national legislature in Mexico.

Why should the Mexican midterm elections be of any interest to us this time around—or ever? Simply because there's a good chance that, for the first time in 55 years, the Mexican people will elect a large and vocal opposition. If the ruling party resists this unprecedented competition by fraud or repression, civil war could break out south of the border, sending thousands of refugees fleeing north.

Farfetched as this may seem, CIA analysts and other experts are taking the matter seriously. Here's what my associate Dale Van Atta has learned from various intelligence sources:

Mexico's claims to democratic tradition cannot withstand close scrutiny. Despite its populist rhetoric, it is an oligarchy on the lines of such benign autocracies as Saudi Arabia. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party resembles in its size and structure the Soviet Communist Party more than a Western political party.

"The Institutional Revolutionary Party is aptly named," a secret State Department report observes. "It grew out of two decades of chaos. It can only be understood as the major institutional product of a shapeless revolution. Its lack of an overriding ideology has made it evolve into something more 'institutional' than 'revolutionary.'"

The report notes that the PRI hasn't lost a presidential election since 1929. "But it has lost its revolutionary fervor," the report adds. The election in July will be the PRI's first major challenge since 1929.

"One reason for the PRI's success has been its promotion of social mobility—inside the club. Bright outsiders and new ideas are co-opted into the party. As newcomers rise in the hierarchy and enjoy increasing benefits from party membership, their loyalty to the party increases at the expense of former loyalties," explains the report.

This is why the emergence of a viable opposition, the conservative National Action Party, or PAN, has caused such consternation among the PRI leadership. The electoral victories PAN achieved in 1983—five of 61 contested legislative seats and nine of 105 municipal posts—may seem paltry, but they scared the PRI bosses.

The reaction to these modest stirrings of dissent, successful dissent, that is, was interesting and ominous. The government declared many of the election results invalid, which led to rioting.

A top-secret CIA report suggests that PAN will win even more seats in next summer's election. Indeed, if the elections aren't rigged, Mexican voters might give the opposition party a sweeping victory at the polls.

But will the PRI sit still and let a vocal opposition party move into the Chamber of Deputies in strength? Not likely. Victory in the midterm election would put PAN in a good position for the 1988 presidential campaign, and a defeat then is something the ruling party cannot allow.